

There is nothing the nearness of Christ cannot overcome

Coming to Know Him

Witnessing, preaching, and teaching are all interesting in that we start out talking about the One we do not know and yet who knows us perfectly. Since we do not know Him we inadvertently preach ourselves in that we tell what we believe God is like, actually making Him out to be in our image. So many times a judgmental person will preach that God is vengeful. The perfectionist will make God out to be all about the Law. The rejected will make God a rejecting God that is impossible to please with more and more work being required. Actually, preaching more often than not reveals more about the preacher than it ever does God. Therefore, God must step in, for we are in His image and can reveal something of Him. Again, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Often this revealing will take the form of breaking down any false concept that we have attributed to God. For example, if the legalist believes God is all about the Law, God will lift His hand and let the legalist break himself against his own rules. If one believes that God will refuse to forgive certain sins, he may find himself in that very sin. God does nothing that is not redemptive or apart from the context of the fact that He is love. He merely would like us to understand and represent what and whom He really is when we are talking to others about Him. Look at the Apostles. God turned out to be something at the end of their lives that confounded what they thought He was in the beginning of their lives. The Religion makes too much of the Apostles' and Saints' sacrifices, because whatever it was they had given—even if giving up their lives—it is not to be compared to what was received.

Numbers

23:19,

God is not a man,
that he should lie,
nor a son of man,
that he should
change his mind.
Does he speak
and then not act?

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Life on Earth, Part III

I was surprised to discover that a big appeal for people of exiting the earth and heading for heaven is the silent belief that there would be the absence of choice in heaven. The reasoning is pretty straightforward: Since sin is a choice and there will be no sin in heaven, then that must mean that mankind will finally be free from choice. The caterpillar will become a butterfly without choice. A sapling oak will become a great oak without choice. "Choose" and "choice" are used one hundred forty-two times in the Bible. Man does appear to have a choice. Heaven will certainly be an interesting place if there is no choice. Once in a new heaven, a new earth, a new body, and the Bride of Christ, it may be that the right choice is the only choice that makes any sense. Well, these are things that one thinks about on a long plane flight! As for the passage quoted above with its implications for being in heaven, I am thinking of it differently. Instead of having a great sense of relief that there will be a time in the future when there is no longer any mourning, or crying, or pain, I am applying that passage to the present with a different view. God put me in a fallen world and a fallen body, He permits what He could prevent, and this is my only opportunity to experience mourning, crying, and pain, for those things will be absent in heaven. It is important that I learn from those things while I have the occasion. How will I learn that He is the God of all comfort if I have never mourned? How will I know the mercy, love, and goodness of God if I cannot, like David, wash my face and move forward? The lame man went walking, and leaping, and praising God because he was in pain and God removed it. I have never seen a perfectly healthy person walking, and leaping, and praising God. We must stop seeing our lives in these bodies, in this world with its sin and its governments, as a curse. I believe in so doing we are missing out on the human experience that has divine revelations of the One whom we love because He first loved us. To whom would the love of God mean the most, the one who has only experienced love his whole life or the one who has been an untouchable? "We would see Jesus" is our cry, in everything. He has much more for all of us. You have just a few years to enjoy the experience of being human. You will never again experience the wind on your face, a cup of cold water on a hot day, intimacy with the one you love, a full moon, the heavens above, and more. We are privileged to be on this journey.



Revelations

4:21,

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

The Races of Man

What is discussed in different parts of the world is always interesting to me. I have often noted that I have a theological paradigm. Others do, as well, and sometimes what is important to me is not to them, and vice versa. This is easily settled with the acknowledgment that each of us is only one thread in the tapestry of Christian life, and together we are, in fact, a body. Oneness does not come from agreeing on what we believe but in agreeing on Him in whom we trust, Christ. The topic of race seems to turn up everywhere, though there is a huge difference between the racism practiced in most countries—where one geographical group considers itself superior to another—and the racism that sees another people group as less human or even nonhuman. I suppose there is an element of racism that came with the Tower of Babel as men separated into language groups. The pride of man came to the forefront, and instead of seeing the wickedness that caused the separation, man began to boast in the separation and view his people in his language group as superior; this would easily transfer to include his “race.” Race has caused many wars; however, the majority of these wars did not stem from seeing others as not actually being human. This is my problem with evolution, since some races unavoidably are seen as “links” to the superior race, the survival of the fittest! The earlier diagrams from the Theory of Evolution are disturbing. I suppose that in some way the Tower of Babel introduced an aspect of segregation, but it did not introduce the concept of dehumanizing man. That task has been left to the wicked around the world that do it in a variety of ways. I am asked, “What do you think of interracial marriage?” What a question! First, I would want to know the purpose of the question and whether affirmation or denial is desired from the answer. Some, in their flesh, have a vested interest in a negative or a positive response. To these I really have nothing to say, for it is not what they are doing but the why that will condemn them. Amen. Presently I am thinking of some very big-hearted believers in other countries that have asked the question in humility, honesty, and sincerity. On the other hand, the argument most often hidden behind by those that dehumanize humans is that God separated the races at the Tower of Babel,

Genesis 1:26-28,

Then God said,
“Let Us make
man in Our image,
according to Our
likeness; and let
them rule over
the fish of the sea
and over the birds
of the sky and
over the cattle
and over all the
earth, and over every
creeping thing
that creeps on
the earth.” God
created man in
His own image, in
the image of God
He created him;
male and female
He created them.
God blessed them;
and God said to
them, “Be fruitful
and multiply, and
fill the earth, and
subdue it; and
rule over the fish
of the sea and
over the birds of
the sky and over
every living thing
that moves on the
face of the earth.”



The Races of Man (cont.)

one of the sons of Noah was cursed, or Cain was given a mark after he killed his brother. This is actually even believed by many in Africa. While the Biblical events are all true, none has a single thing to do with dehumanizing people. Then there is a parallel drawn from nature in the suggestion that birds and fish stay within their "kind," and so people naturally segregate, and so on. Back to creation, God created man, singular, and He created fish and birds, plural. Within the fish of the sea, God put within them a boundary, and the same is true of all the birds of the air; if not, the uniqueness of the ocean and the skies would be at risk. In that spirit, Paul states that there are different kinds of flesh. I Corinthians 15:38, 39, "But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish." The flesh of animals (many KINDS) is different than the flesh of man (singular, in that it is one KIND). I agree with a point an African was making, a rather simple one. Each kind of fish was to remain within its kind. Man, too, is to remain within his kind, and his kind is human, notwithstanding some differences within mankind that are easily understood considering the dispersion of man after the expulsion from the garden, the flood, isolation, migration, and recessive and dominant genes within man. These are only differences in appearance within the group of man. Man is man, and man can only marry within his kind. (Of course, this excludes the notion of homosexual "marriage," which is not marriage, since the two cannot become one.) When man, who might appear different from someone of his own kind, marries, there is nothing in Scripture against that. Romans 2:10, 11, "but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." Interracial marriage is not up for debate. However, there is something else that is not up for debate that should be, and that is the impropriety of scientists who break the commandment of God by mixing "kinds" in the laboratory. The mule is not a created being but a result of two different created beings, and he is therefore forbidden.



Permitting vs. Preventing

I am fascinated by and enjoying the amazing move toward 3-D movies. My first real experience with this technology was at the World's Fair in Seoul, Korea. I remember the little old women in traditional dress waving their hands in front of themselves to push away the images that appeared to be coming toward their faces. As an aside, I did make a mistake on that trip, in that there were few Westerners visiting and somehow the word spread among the crowd that I was Dustin Hoffman, the American actor. Out of politeness, I started signing autographs for the spectators who had waited for me to emerge from an exhibit. It was people-pleasing gone mad, and it spiraled out of control when hundreds began to wait, and in the end I was exited out the back door of the fair! By the way, I am happy just being me. Well, back to the theater, we are given glasses that allow us to see what the producer wants us to see, which are things that do not really exist. In a like manner we are given "theological glasses" so that we see what the giver wants us to see. Often it simply is not there. From our youth denominations have given us glasses to see what they desired to be seen. Something that must be twisted and distorted to be seen is rarely something that is true. Man is intent on knowing and systematizing God, which brings comfort to those that lack faith. Honestly, the mind of the created will never fully understand the mind of the Creator; it is not possible. The end result is the categorizing of believers. Are you Calvinist, Armenian, pre-tribulation, covenant, free will, sovereignty, full gospel, Spirit-filled, or more? When we hear a speaker, the glasses go on and we try to pigeonhole him. Often this is merely done to discount what is being said. Many actually are comforted by the thought that denominational leaders have already addressed all the pertinent issues, and therefore, they do not need to. Of course, in all of this is the pride of man that makes him unteachable because of blindness and deafness. Why say all this? Simply because I do not believe that the people of God are so stupid, unenlightened, ignorant, or "sheepish" (in the negative sense of the term) that the panic button has to be hit when they are hearing something outside the denomination's


Hebrews

12:26, 27,


"And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' And this expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."



Permitting vs. Preventing (cont.)



theological box. Denominational leaders generally hate and oppose the teaching of the equality of believers. After all, they have sat through countless meaningless meetings and kissed up to hordes of self-important men to get to the place of wearing a robe or in other ways being “recognized.” If all men and women were equal in Christ, they would have to admit to a wasted life. In fact, I have noticed that the equality of believers in revelation, relationship, and understanding of Christ creates a jealousy in those that have jumped through the hoops to gain some church-styled superiority. Amen. I do believe that I do not know a thing more than any other believer, that I do not have a special dispensation, that I do not have a special handle on the truth, and that others’ insights into Jesus are as important as mine, period. This is the foundation for looking at permission and preventing. I am not speaking in Calvinistic, Armenian, free-will, foreknowledge, or any other terms. I am just posing a question to a fellow believer, to a brother or sister in Christ. Ready? Does God permit what He could prevent? To bring this question quickly into black and white, I will add suicide to my question. Does God permit some to commit suicide and prevent others? If the answer is no, then we should stop praising God for situations in which a believer was delivered. I have heard hundreds of such testimonies. “My son was to take the bus, we got him there late, the bus ended up going off a cliff, and everyone died. Praise God that my son was not on the bus.” “There was a huge traffic accident, and if my daughter had been there one second earlier, she would not be here, praise God.” “My husband, praise God, at the last minute was sent to a different unit; his former unit was attacked, and no one survived.” “My wife overdosed, and her aunt that she had not seen for years was in town, came to the house, called the police, and today my wife is alive, praise God.” Now, if God did not prevent these things, we must just say that it was fate, and fate must be praised. On the other hand, if we are to thank God for preventing a death, we must admit that He has permitted others to die. For some reason that thought is quite objectionable to believers. It seems to







lead to questions, justifications, and accusations, such as, “What kind of a God permits wars, death, and accidents?” This begs for an answer to the obvious question, “Well, what do you believe in? Buddha, Krishna, spirits, the government? How can you keep believing when those ‘gods’ permit wars, death, and accidents?” Wars, deaths, and accidents are all absolutes; however, preventing and permitting is not to be equated with causing. The worship of false gods does cause those things, sin in human beings does cause those things, but the Creator does not cause them. If I let the dominoes fall in the direction of saying that God does not permit and prevent, the end is chaos, and there is really no need to have a God but just press on in chaos and fate. Therefore, I must say that I believe that God will both permit and prevent. This is not a stretch on two counts. First, I believe what the Scripture teaches, “Flesh and blood does not enter the Kingdom of God.” This establishes an absolute: man must die. This then leads to another Biblical truth: the days of man are numbered. If God numbers our days, then can a drunken driver shorten them? Can a war shorten them? Can cancer shorten them? Can suicide shorten them? I do not believe it is accurate to say that a murderer took a life, but that he was the “means” by which the life was taken; he was not permitted to take the life until the fullness of time, for flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God. I do not believe that cancer took the life of someone’s mate. I believe that flesh and blood does not enter the Kingdom of God, and cancer was the means by which God permitted the loved one to exit. To recap, God has numbered our days, we must exit, there must be a means of our exiting, and God permits or prevents that “means” according to His will and the number of our days that are set. Therefore, if the means of exiting is suicide, murder, war, disease, or old age (which is technically a disease), what is the difference? Here is how I see it. God permits the perfect means that will accomplish the most in His will. Take for example murder, which did not happen without permission, His permitting. However, the means will




Permitting vs. Preventing (cont.)




accomplish much. For those that have a heart for the Lord, hearing the news will break them. My children attended Columbine High School, famous for the mass murders. Hundreds of students turned their hearts toward Christ. Those who were killed only exited by permission. Those that did the killing by permission had their hearts revealed also; they were murderers. The glory of God is in choice. He permits choice, but choice is within His parameters. This means that man chooses, but God, in a sense, restrains the choice until the perfect time, when the choice will either reveal the soft hearts of people or their hard hearts. They will receive a blessing or a curse. Their judgment will be "good and faithful servant" or "depart from Me." Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the good that God did to him. Is that not amazing to see? Some have pitted themselves against God, and anything that happens that does not prove their assessment of Him must be twisted and distorted in their minds to continue to support their position. At that point God is condemned by them if He helps and condemned if He does not. Even the blessings of God prove to them that God is to be rejected. One day I will die. I do not know the means, but I believe that those means will be perfect, and some will recognize Jesus and others will have the cup of judgment filled as they refuse to see Jesus. God is really incredible! Now, if God has permitted something that is unpleasant into our life, it was done out of love. He only permits in the believer's life the things that will build the believer. I know so many people that would never have come to Christ if they had not been abused. Does this mean that God condones abuse? Never! It means that He allows wicked men to choose, wicked men choose to do something wicked to victims, and those wicked men will be judged. However, it also means that God permitted the wicked to act in a believer's life only because it would ultimately drive him to Jesus. Had it not driven him toward Christ, He would have prevented it. This takes revelation, but it will set the believer free and keep him from living in regret concerning an event





in time; the enemy only knows the past and therefore comes to whisper, "If that had not happened to you, if God had prevented it, you would be fulfilled and happy." It is a lie. The facts are that if the event had not happened, the believer might never have come to know Christ. No doubt the wicked meant it to destroy the person, but God meant it to build him, and He has the last word. Now, having established the above—that we must exit, there must be a means to our exit, and God will maximize the means of our exit—I will revisit my question. Is there a difference between exiting through old age or suicide? No! Many of us have had to experience a suicide in our families. Mine is no different. I know the questions that are left unanswered (something to be discussed at a later time). God permits. I have more stories from those that wanted to commit suicide and it did not work out than I do notes from families who had to deal with a suicide. God has both permitted and prevented. In our minds, the consequences of the "means" of exiting are much different. I must agree. Suicide is the most hurtful thing anyone can do to those he loves. It is much easier to blame a war or a drunk driver for a death than to blame the person that did it to himself. However, I believe God did permit. Many "victims" of suicide have gone as far as they are going to go in this life concerning the revelation of Christ. God permits their exit in order to avoid many negatives that might come their way in the future. This is hard to grasp, since we only see someone exiting as missing out on blessings. This is deception, because we all know the daily struggles of life with a small "l" as we discover life with a capital "L." I believe that the God of LOVE permits a teenager to die in an accident because the revelation he needed was attained, and to remain on the earth would actually send him in reverse. I believe the same of the person that commits suicide. I began all of this by saying that you have Christ, Christ is teaching you, and we are equal. This is my assessment, my gospel, and I have shared it with you. Amen.




The “Now What?” Ministry

We constantly learn from others. All discipleship, good or bad, that we have received passes through His hands and is a positive in our lives. From two men in particular I have learned greatly by their negative discipleship; both taught me through their example the folly of taking credit for the work of God in a believer's life and the stupidity of marching to one's own praise band, refusing any criticism. This awareness of negative discipleship's being a positive in me leaves me with the hope that my negatives can be a positive for others! It has also caused me not to place so much weight on criticism (which has often been mindless). However, here is a criticism that I just do not understand. It is fairly consistent, so I have to take it to Jesus and ask if there is validity in it. There seems to be a bunch of believers that do not have in their paradigm the concept that a Christian who has failed can move forward in Christ and not have to suffer the consequences of his sins for the rest of his life. His failure does and should make him a second-class Christian the rest of his life. I am accused of not being hard enough on sin, taking Christians' failure lightly, talking about mercy, and, in so doing, giving a passive consent to sin. I keep saying, "I do not," and I keep hearing, "Yes, you do." There is no evidence behind the accusations; I have never condoned sin, moral failures, self-righteousness, judgmental attitudes, spiritual exclusiveness, or those that cause division. But in the world in which I live, I do meet believers that have fallen into all of the above and more; that is a fact. So my question to their repentance is, "Now what?" I have a "Now What?" ministry. To a large extent the Epistles are written addressing the problems into which believers have fallen, having taken their focus off of Christ. It is not a stretch to say that every person that enjoys reading the Epistles is indebted to believers that failed on some level. In essence, we learn from their failures. Without


I John

1: 9-10,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.



these varied problems we would lack a good portion of the New Testament! We also must see the additional aspect of the writers' wanting the believers redeemed, pressing on, renewed in their love for Christ, and expressing the life of Jesus within them. There is no hint that once their problem is addressed and they have repented, that they must live a life of consequences in self-condemnation. I remember when a prominent "evangelist" said, "Any man that has had an immoral thought is an outcaste and can never minister." Three days later his photo was taken, showing his own immorality. No believer is a castaway. Christians fall, but we must let them see that they can fall forward into the lap of love. They need not live in regret. I have often taught that it is not wise for a believer to marry an unbeliever, but the fact remains that some do. Now what? Repeatedly tell the believers they are out of the will of God, until we drive them away from God, and in so doing compound their problems? No, we tell them to keep moving forward in Christ and not to allow their decision to define them, to let Jesus, and Jesus alone, define them. You get the picture, and the list of shortcomings of believers goes on. I have noticed that there is a jealousy among the religious (defined as those that believe success rests in their hands with the many things they must do) when they see the freedom enjoyed by faith persons (defined as those that believe in resting in Jesus and His Righteousness, for nothing is impossible for Jesus). It is easy for the religious to judge someone as hopeless when his flesh flows in a ravine theirs does not. Here is the warning: God can turn that same critical light on them, and they will not stand. Judgmental people are keeping their own list while failing at His list always. Having examined the options, I must line up on the side of faith and believe that there is a glorious "Now what" for every believer who has had a failure.



Faith Believes God

Man can never obligate God; the Sovereign can never oblige Himself to the thing He has created (save out of love). He cannot do that and remain true to His character. Paul makes it clear that what makes the Law appalling is the attitude that can accompany it. As always, it is not what you do but why you do it. When the Law is kept with an attitude that the Creator is now indebted and obligated to the Law keeper, that Law keeper has now become the enemy of God.

I have watched this attitude covertly manifest itself over the years, usually revealed in a hint of frustration. First, do you believe that if your sin, behavior, or flaw were to leave you, God would then do something for you? Rather, do you believe that God would actually owe you something? Why do Christians say things like this? "I did everything the Scriptures said and my unwed daughter got pregnant." "I went through premarital counseling and prayed, yet my marriage fell apart." "I have served God my whole life, and yet my mate died and I am left alone." "I followed the advice in all the books on financial responsibility, and still I lost my house!" "I have done all this myself" goes the assertion, and a close listen reveals there is a hint of the "God owes me" attitude, the attitude of keeping the Law, obligating God, and becoming an enemy of Christ. There are many religious programs that feed this attitude: prayer programs, child-rearing programs, and relationship and church-growth programs. Do this or do that, pray all night every night, and God will owe you a blessing. As we have mentioned, there is a big difference between religion and faith. Religion is man-based, gives man activities, and then asserts that this earns for man the "right" to ask (require) something from God. Faith recognizes and

Romans 4: 1-8,

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who

(cont.)





(cont.)

does not work,
but believes in
Him who justifies
the ungodly, his
faith is credited
as righteousness,
just as David also
speaks of the
blessing on the
man to whom
God credits
righteousness
apart from works:
'BLESSED ARE
THOSE WHOSE
LAWLESS DEEDS
HAVE BEEN
FORGIVEN,
AND WHOSE
SINS HAVE
BEEN COVERED.
BLESSED IS THE
MAN WHOSE
SIN THE LORD
WILL NOT
TAKE INTO AC-
COUNT.'"


values the activity of God, whose action toward us is what is important, and it is not based on our behavior. Faith is based in our response to His activity. Many wonder why keeping the religious law (whatever flavor that takes today) leaves them depleted, feeling hopeless, and somehow unacceptable. The explanation is simple; the attitude of doing in order to get is anti-Christ. God will never become anyone's debtor. "God so loved the world that He gave." God is the initiator; He loves and He gives. There was no arm-twisting by man to get the Father to give His Son, and to think that a created being could do that kind of arm-twisting is error. Remember, if man could twist His arm at one point by keeping the Law, he could twist it at another. Hence, Abraham was accepted by faith; he was not receiving what was worked for. Abraham's life played out for us that which is in line with the character of God.

Well, I have never been known for rededication services, for asking people to bow their heads and raise their hands. I am not known to motivate people to surrender to the ministry or the mission field. I do not ask that people choose tonight never to have another fight in their marriage, never to take another drink, or never to look at porno. Why? Those activities do not work. However, there is something I would ask the reader to do.

There is a wonderful story of Jacob's encounter with God in Genesis 28. To paraphrase, God met Jacob in a dream, and Jacob realized that he was dealing with the one true God. Acting on that revelation, Jacob in effect said, "I want to make a deal with You. I see that You are God. I am going on a journey, and if You keep me safe, give me food, clothe me, and make me wealthy, I will do two things for You. I will let You be my God and give you back a fraction of what You give to me." Wow, what an




Faith Believes God (cont.)



offer! I can just see God talking to an angel in heaven and saying, "My, how do I pass up that offer?" Jacob was offering nothing for everything! God's response was, "OK!" Jacob was living in faith, not by the Law. He was not offering something as a bargaining chip and then obligating God. He simply recognized God and let God give freely to him. I wonder if what went through Jacob's head in the following days went something like this: "My God will not accept anything from a man and yet gives everything. My God does not want anything from me except my recognition. He is a God that loves and gives. This God is not like a man; He is the one true God." Jacob was justified by his faith. Before he departed, he put a stone in that place and called it, "God is in this place." He had an encounter with the true and living God who is so outside the box of all the false gods that are claimed to demand activity before they are even reputed to listen. Remember that all false gods live in a contract relationship with man. When man does, then they do. The one, true, living God establishes a covenant relationship with man. He does, period.

Back to what I would ask you to do today, I would like you to make an exchange with God, make the deal that I made with Him. One day I said to Him, "I will give you nothing if You will give me everything." He said, "OK," and since that day I have received, received, and received the revelation of Christ in me, the hope of glory. Can you offer Him your nothing? Is there anyone too weak to have a "nothing" to trade? Do it and you will move into faith and an experience of God that is so precious that all other things will be counted as rubbish. Do it and you, too, will say, "God is in this place." "There you





go again, talking about all that God does and leaving us with nothing to do!" Well, I must give you something to do: rest and receive. You will receive not because you kept the program but because God loves and gives. Until the above happens all attempts to keep the Law will end in disaster. He did not give to you because you obligated Him through the keeping of the Law, but because you gave Him your nothing, so what is left in which to boast? "If anyone boasts, let Him boast in the Lord."

Psalm 34

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul will make its boast in the LORD;
The humble will hear it and rejoice.
- 3 O magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
- 4 I sought the LORD, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces will never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
And saved him out of all his troubles.
- 7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who
fear Him, And rescues them.
- 8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!



What Do You See?

What do you see? This may be the most important question that you must answer in the next few years. Like you, I receive notes from friends who have lost their jobs, had their wages reduced, or in some other way endured a loss. When that pressure is heaped on top of that which already existed in family life through needs, relationship hiccups, and an increasingly decadent, anti-God world environment, it is easy to lose hope and slip into despair. Often when discipling I hear a plethora of comments that reveal what is seen. "I am in the wrong place to find a relationship." "There simply is not anyone hiring." "We have had the same trouble for years in our marriage, and it is not going to change." "I have tried everything with my son, and he continues on his own way." "I am just tired of being run over." "I have been depressed for years." Well, you get the point. We, like the servant of Elisha, only see the circumstance and not the God who is always behind the circumstance. If we could recognize our God behind the events, we could rest in this moment and not let our emotions and thoughts race ahead to the worst possible outcome, letting events yet to happen determine our lack of joy and peace today. Remember that saying "Praise God" one time before knowing the outcome of a situation is worth a thousand repetitions of "Praise God" after the situation. In these times believers must draw upon their history with God. We do have a history with Him. Has He ever left us? Has He ever forsaken us? Have we starved, to date? Have we never had shelter? "I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). I would be lying to say there were not times in my life when I had lost hope, and in those times my one problem merely multiplied into many more. Hope is the incubator for life. To lose it is to lose life. We are not of those that are "having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12b). When I have been in the place of hopelessness, I have prayed that God would open my eyes to see Him all around me. He is there, He shows no partiality, and He is in the middle of our circumstances. Often I have seen believers in a pit; it would be inaccurate to say they are not!

II Kings 6:15-17

Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.



They are! The best advice does not encourage those for whom all options appear to be gone. I simply ask them to invite Jesus into the pit with them, because He takes responsibility for everything into which we invite Him. "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you . . . and after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Peter 5:7 & 10).

Flesh vs Spirit

Often I hear the complaint, "I hate the war against the Spirit. If only I could stay in the Spirit." These complaints lead to a common teaching in the Church, one that attempts to encourage us to "fight the good fight" and to "look forward to heaven, where this battle no longer takes place" . . . a heaven, I presume, where there is no choice. (It sounds as though we will all mindlessly be singing praises to the Lamb, and not because we choose to. Of course, choice seems to be a curse in the minds of many, and they would relish the thought of ridding themselves of that troublesome capacity.) Well, I would like to go on record that I do not hate the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. There are certain topics that definitely need to be settled. Is God attempting to oversee chaos, or is God the God of order? If He is overseeing chaos, then there is a great battle between good and evil, and Satan (in the minds of many) has equal power, we are caught in the middle, and we must somehow muster up the spiritual, emotional, and physical to side with God and win this great battle. Wow! Honestly, this thinking, which is not hard to find, is one of the enemy's greatest coups. It can be subtle, but we hear it in e-mails that plead that believers all over the world pray for protection, healing, and blessing and pray against the advance of the enemy, disease, and poverty. Actually, if you are a believer and no one prays for your cancer, do you believe that your chances of being heard personally by Him or enlisting His activity in your life are lessened? Do you believe that if no one prays for your unbelieving mate, and yet you in your belief pray, God does not hear you? Do you believe that when you pray in your loneliness and

Galatians 5:15, 17

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

Flesh vs Spirit (cont.)

isolation for your daughter, who is living with someone who definitely does not appear to be good for her in any way, that God does not hear you? There is one mediator between man and God, and it is that man Jesus. We need a paradigm shift. God is in charge! Satan is not! Disease is not! Man is not! Financial markets are not! Doctors are not! Ship captains are not! Your pastor is not! Your employer is not! Your children are not! God is in charge. Period. Well, you get the point. Prayer is a participation in what God is doing, and we must get over the notion of an arm-twisting fight against a defeated foe. Honestly, from Genesis to Revelation, God is in charge. Yet, with the wrong glasses, which seem to be handed out in many Christian religious circles like 3D glasses at the movies, it looks like God is attempting to win, Satan is gaining, and we are the determining factor. Our flesh is not in charge! Our flesh is not the problem, period! The flesh is permitted by God as the means of pushing, even driving us into the life of the Spirit. It might sound odd, but I like my flesh; I like what it does for me. If I do not like the expression of my flesh, then I must simply allow it to accomplish the goal God intended of driving me to the Spirit. Sometime today I will get angry, so what will be my response? "Oh, my rotten flesh! If only the flesh did not make me angry!" Or this: "Oh, my flesh always acts the same way, and now it is reminding me that I began this day somehow believing that it could live just fine without an active submission to the Lord. Who do I think I am? Jesus was God among man and yet said that of Himself He could do nothing. Jesus, You are welcome here; come and be my joy and peace today. Thank You, Jesus, for giving me a body of flesh that reminds me that life can be Life on this earth." What glasses are we wearing? Better yet, what eye surgery have we been given? Heaven held some hellishness when angels, who are not even created in the image of God, decided they were gods in and of themselves. What kind of world would this become if no one had flesh? More specifically, what kind of person would you be without flesh? You would be a monster living in the midst of monsters. My flesh has been an ugly mirror that has made me take my assessments, my treatment of others, and my disdain down a notch, or rather, three, four, five, and one hundred notches. A man was bemoaning





what his former alcoholism had done to his family. I looked him straight in the face and delivered this word, "You are an ass! If you had not become an alcoholic, the flesh--your pride, arrogance, drive, and self-righteousness--would have done a thousand times more damage to your family than the alcohol." There was no argument in his eyes; the flesh had humbled him. We all need humbling, and the flesh is sent by God to do it. The world idolizes men who are a 1% success at playing God, but then the facts of their flesh become known: they were thieves, drug addicts, perverts, adulterers, self-centered, and all of this is attempted to be hidden through threats, courts, and disclaimers. The fact is that the flesh is bringing them down to the level of admitting their need for Jesus in order to live just one day, something humanists do not want to acknowledge. There is a famous man whose picture appears in nearly every Christian home on a particular continent, though he is an atheist and has participated in murder; in short, he has flesh, and yet any mention of that fact is avoided and met with shock. The "positive" side of his flesh is attested to as something to be idolized and worthy of attainment. Those that hate the flesh will look for the good in the flesh. The most unrighteous will become the most self-righteous. Those who despise the negative will attempt to obtain the positive. However, when someone sees God, he gets off the rollercoaster and understands that the flesh is not there to be hated or loved; it is there to drive man to Life. In hating or loving it, a person will become a monster, nothing short of a distortion. I saw a woman who was obsessed with the "Barbie doll" and had all the plastic surgery to become an exact replica; she had become a monster. I saw another man who had obsessed on the art of Salvador Dali; in the end, he became a monster. It is all relative, but flesh, good or bad, will make anyone a distortion, a monster. I have seen men on the platform at Christian conventions that were monsters. The flesh, if not seen as something that drives us to Him to allow Him to be for us what the flesh can never be, will distort us. I do not hate my flesh, I do not love my flesh, but I see it as a marvelous tool in the hand of God, who is in total control and has my very best interests nestled in the deepest part of His heart.



Acknowledged Intelligence & Creativity is the End of Intelligence & Creativity!

I must admit that I love the way God works. There is the world and there is God. There is my perception, from my "earth" suit, and then there is His. I probably enjoy this the most in my own life from being an "international speaker." Can you imagine such folly on the part of God? Michael Wells, a published author! What a joke. That very thought to those who knew me growing up (probably until age 30) would have evoked a justifiable laugh. Add to the mix that it is the support team that makes it possible for me to be like the donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem as I travel from country to country (the singing and palm leaves were not for the donkey). Actually, the donkey has it over me on many counts not worth mentioning. You know me and I see no difference between the believer that published a book and the one that did not, or between the preacher of a "mega church" and the one with five worshippers attending his meetings. This much, despite my stupidity, I have gotten right. What happens is not about man; it is about Jesus. I just wanted to make a point to my friends. I have a witness, and the witness is that I have seen God witness THROUGH me to something He has spent years bringing to the forefront in a believer's life. I have witnessed the life-changing impact of a witness to the witness of the Holy Spirit. As far as I know, I have not believed that I created anything but merely witnessed to it. This is to say, again, that I (pray for me) will never forget my place in the spiritual "food chain." In one way, I could say, "Support those with larger meetings and more spectacular reports." But honestly, you support ALMI because we reach the weak and the remote with a witness of hope. The point is that much has been done in the lives of believers that, when looking back, we realize we had very little to do with; we were merely a witness to what God was doing. We know that if He gets all the glory then He does all the work. However, here is what I often see: Recognized creativity and intelligence in one's self is the end of creativity and intelligence in one's self, for God is only Creative to the one that does not know what to do and gives wisdom to the foolish. If we truly want to remain wise and creative in our lives, we must constantly acknowledge that we are not wise and creative and we need His wisdom and His creativity. I promise that this will change life, marriage, parenting skills, work ethics, and more. When

I Corinthians, 3:18,

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise.





boasting that WE had a revelation, that WE were wise, and that WE watched lives turned around, WE are done! Period! It is a spiritual absolute. When I see men take credit and copyright a revelation of God, it is the last one they will have; they have proven they are not to be trusted with the talents that are given. They bury their talent.

God does give revelation to man, but I must repeat, GOD gives revelation to man, and if that revelation helped you with your family, do not make a program around yourself. Let me expand on this. Let us say that you are talking to someone that KNOWS about the government, he KNOWS everything that is happening. He KNOWS about the news media and KNOWS about what the world leaders are up to. He KNOWS all about abortion, gay rights, people's thinking, and more. He KNOWS. Well, how would you have a conversation with someone that KNOWS? I would like to know how he KNOWS so much about things that are hidden from the rest of us. Then based on the "absolute" of what he KNOWS, he has a solution. This is really amazing to watch. Here is a statement that I really marvel at: "It is KNOWN that Christians are a people of hate and bigotry." My, someone needs to double up on the pink pills the doctor gave him. He KNOWS that Christians are a people of hate? When believers in the U.S. alone gave 500 billion in aid around the world, when believers fight against slavery, when believers fight oppression, when believers want the best for a pregnant fourteen-year-old in Haiti? I could go on, but why? The someone's of the world "KNOW." Then when they happen to get trapped in a corner because of the illogic of what they "KNOW," they really do not KNOW, and my statement is that they have been driving all along if they do not really KNOW but have been telling me all along how they really FEEL. Jesus KNEW, and I would sit at his feet, but for all these people who KNOW, why in the world would I sit at their feet? Is God telling them each night what is happening around the world? Definitely there is a "knowing" in the spirit. All I "know in the spirit" is that Jesus is the Way and every other way is not the way. However, when talking to someone who "KNOWS" all there is to know about man, I shift to a different topic to keep from going mad. I do not know how shellfish grow. I do not know how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. I do not know why a hippo hates fires. There is so much that I do not know that maybe he will know about!



ALMI NEWS

New Building Planned for Mt. Alford

Mt. Alford Christian Conference Centre in Boonah, Queensland, Australia, announces that after many delays, council hiccups and red herrings, re-planning and relocating, their new staff house is underway. Phil, Wendy, Makarla, and Mitchell have lived for ten years in a small cottage with no kitchen or laundry. As the children have grown, the house has shrunk, a rather intense communal experience!

Since first proposed, building costs, council fees, and government grabs have all gone through the roof, so their financial reserve for building is inadequate for the task. On the positive side, they have more bookings this year than ever before, which will bring funds to channel into property development.

Steve Reinhard is organizing help for Mt. Alford in the form of giving skilled craftsmen (trim carpenters and tile setters) information on how they could travel to Australia to donate their services in May or August, so if any of you able builders can get away, contact him for details at sreinhard@electricalexcellence.com.

—Greetings! It is soon to be spring, and the ALMI schedule is full on for the rest of the year. Mike left for South America mid-March and will not return until June 1st. Raimundo Ericson, longtime friend, interpreter, translator, and pastor in his own right has been doing the legwork for the last year to put this year's program together, with conferences planned in Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Chile, and Colombia for this spring.

—We are continuing the work of translating books and material into a variety of languages and making them accessible to the people.

—In our recent visit to India, Alex Mathew, whom many of you know, was found, along with his wife, to be in ill health. Remember them in your prayers. Alex has been a great support

ALMI NEWS

to the ALMI work in India for many years. He continues his very busy schedule of ministry, but his heart has deteriorated beyond repair. However, the true heart of the man has only enlarged and gotten healthier. In many ways it seems the state of his physical heart merely reflects the broken heart he has carried over the condition of mankind for decades. He is a very loving man.

—The meetings in India definitely occurred in the fullness of time. I spoke in the third most “holy” site in India, and in this Hindu place Christianity has been opposed for centuries, yet we were able to meet and move freely, witnessing to Christ and the conversion of several Hindus. Really exciting! Steve Reinhard hopes to return there this fall; he, too, spoke there last year.

—You might have heard of Betty’s monkey bite; she completed her round of rabies shots when we returned to the U.S. and did not contract any other monkey-born diseases. She is in good health once again!

—Betty continues to edit when she does travel with me, and progress is being made in our next upcoming book, *My Weakness for His Strength*. Kay continues to oil the wheels of the office at ALMI. Tim Lester continues to do training for ALMI and is hosting marriage tune-up weekends in Hagerstown, MD.

—The ALMI training center in Australia is in the middle of a building project while ministering to the Queensland flood victims in the area.

—Thanks to our Support Team for the positive response they have given us over the new format of the trip reports, beautifully crafted by Dawn Paul.

—Prayer is not arm-twisting God to obligate Him to do what we desire; rather, prayer is an invitation by God for us to participate in what He has determined to do. We are so grateful to all of you who are obedient to the invitation from God to pray for the work of ALMI, that we might make clear the message of “Christ in you, the hope of glory”!





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2011 TRAVEL SCHEDULE

**INDIA,
JANUARY, 2011**

**URUGUAY,
ARGENTINA,
MARCH & APRIL, 2011**

**CHILE, PERU,
COLOMBIA,
MAY, 2011**

**MEXICO,
SEPTEMBER, 2011**

**CENTRAL AMERICA,
OCTOBER, 2011**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED